Report No. 9.—Bootmaking.

The manufacture of boots and shoes under the factory system has been carried on in New South Wales for nearly thirty years, and is now one of the most vigorous of the staple industries of the Colony. Though the goods manufactured are, for the most part, of a common description, there is a decided disposition on the part of the manufacturers to improve the quality of their product, both in material and workmanship, and to undertake the manufacture of superior classes of goods, the supply of which is at present almost entirely imported. That some of the persons who are engaged in the industry consider the future of their enterprise to be assured is sufficiently proved by the amount of capital they have already expended in the erection of substantial premises, equipped in many instances with the most recent appliances for minimising labour. There are large factories in all the principal towns of the Colony, but the chief seat of the industry is naturally found in the metropolitan district, where the largest factories are situated.

Growth of the Industry.

Excluding those employing fewer than seven hands, in 1878 there were 71 factories, employing 1,883 hands; and in 1891, although the number of factories was reduced to 60, the hands employed had risen to 2,806, giving an average of 46 operatives per factory, the greatest number in any one establishment being 300. The steady growth of the industry may be traced in the following figures:—

Year	No. of Factories.	Hands employed.		Total.
		M.	F.	
1886	65	1,672	433	2,105
1887	68	1,856	416	2,272
1888	60	1,837	436	2,273
1889	57	1,618	427	2,045
1890	59	1,955	465	2,420
1891	60	2,262	544	2,806

It is agreed by both masters and men that the trade has for some time been in a very satisfactory condition, and that it has in recent years displayed new vigour in every direction. This is certainly a matter for congratulation, seeing that the trade in most of the other colonies is in anything but a flourishing condition.

Accommodation.

In about twelve factories of comparatively recent construction, the conditions affecting the health, comfort, and convenience of the operatives have received ample consideration, and the efforts made to secure light, working space, and ventilation, have left little to be desired, nor can any fault be found with the sanitary arrangements. In other cases the factory buildings consist of wooden or iron sheds, barn-like in appearance, and more or less dilapidated and unclean, erected in the first instance without regard for convenience or sanitary considerations, and affording the very poorest accommodation. In these sheds the workers are so closely packed that it is with difficulty they are able to avoid impeding one another; no separate workrooms or conveniences are set apart for the use of the females, and the general arrangement of the premises is not calculated to secure health or comfort, or even the maintenance of ordinary decency.

Apprenticeship.

Although in most cases apprentices are supposed to be regularly indentured, yet they do not scruple to throw aside their indentures whenever it suits their whim or convenience. Their number is now very small, employers, especially those who have large factories, being loth to find room for lads who, experience shows, are likely to abandon their apprenticeship as soon as their services are of any real value to their masters, at whose charge they have acquired a certain degree of proficiency in the trade.

Girls usually enter the trade as "tiers off," to attend on machinists and fitters, fasten ends of threads and paste parts together, and are paid from 3s. to 10s. a week, their term of probation being three or four years. Boys, when taken as apprentices, are expected to wait upon other workers and make themselves generally useful. Their wages are from 2s. 6d. to 15s. during their period of service, usually four years, but there is no uniformity in the practice of the trade, every employer being at liberty to make his own terms of agreement with his apprentices. The opportunities afforded them to learn their trade are so desultory that, at the completion of their period of indenture, apprentices are frequently found very far from being skilful workmen, and for this reason it is no uncommon thing for a father to take his son to assist him in the factory, where he receives no wages, but learns the trade more rapidly and thoroughly than in any other way.

Early in 1891 a question arose in regard to apprenticeship, which for a time threatened to cause a disruption of the good understanding that had for a long time existed between the employers and the employed. It would appear that a factory proprietor had entered into indentures with certain apprentices whose number was in excess of that authorised by the rules of the Union. He was requested to reduce the number to the specified proportion, but pleaded inability to break his arrangements, and also objected on the ground that the resolution in regard to apprenticeship had not been submitted for the approval of the masters previous to his making the engagement, and the Union then declared his shop "black." The Masters' Association gave passive support to the employer by declining to sign the new log, and matters appeared to be rapidly approaching a deadlock which would have rendered futile the mutual work of masters and men in preparing the improved time statement. Better counsels fortunately prevailed, and the dispute was settled by the Union withdrawing its opposition without insisting upon an immediate reduction in the number of apprentices, while the masters agreed that in future the rule regulating the proportion of apprentices should be strictly observed, viz., one for the first three men, and one for every additional six.

Hours

Hours of Labour.

The eight-hour system is observed in the greater number of factories, forty-four hours constituting a weeks' labour for both male and female workers. In the remaining establishments male employes usually work forty-eight hours a week, but in some few cases their time is fifty hours. Overtime is of rare occurrence, and there is no fixed rule in regard to payment for it, the custom in some shops being to pay at the rate of time and a half, and in others at ordinary rates.

Wages.

Among the male hands, cutters, clickers, and apprentices are almost invariably on weekly wages, makers and finishers, on piece-work. Females, except in the few instances where their work is done in their own homes, are paid by the week. For all classes the payment seems to be calculated on a more liberal scale than in any industry demanding a like amount of skill, or indeed than in many industries usually reckoned superior to bootmaking. The average weekly wages for the various classes of operatives are shown in the following table which includes returns from all the factories of any consequence:—

	Wages.		
Hands on Weekly Wages.	Highest.	Lowest.	Average.
Females—			
Fitters	30/-	18/-	23/1
Machinists	32/6	15/-	23/1
Tiers off	10/-	5/-	7/2
Males—			
Sole Cutters	60/-	40/-	45/10
Clickers	55/-	40/-	48/10
Apprentices	15/-	2/6	7/1
Hands on Piece-work.			
Makers	60/-	27/6	42/7
Finishers	100/.	35/-	53/4

In addition to the eight classes mentioned above, there are a few "improvers," for the most part apprentices whose term of probation is finished, who receive wages ranging from 15s. to 30s., and averaging 21s. a week. Foremen and forwomen are found only in a few factories, and their wages average 70s. and 50s. a week, respectively. Home-workers are found in connection with only about a dozen factories, and are, of course, engaged entirely on piece-work, their weekly earnings ranging from 45s. to 70s. for the men, and from 25s. to 32s. 6d. for the women.

Earnings.

The payments to the various classes in the above synopsis represent only the averages of their weekly earning. Statements taken casually from the books of several factories show that their actual individual receipts for any single week may differ widely from the figures there given, "makers," for instance, varying from 83s. 9d. down to 21s., and "finishers" from 96s. to 26s. for one week's work. Hence it is evidently possible for industrious and capable workmen in these classes, to earn very good wages, but the general average is diminished by the lack of steady perseverance and sobriety too frequently characteristic of workers in this trade. On this account it has been found impossible to arrive at any estimate of their average annual earnings.

In this connection it may be mentioned that though many of the hands are steady industrious men, working full time and earning good wages, there are also others who are lazy and dissipated, working only when driven thereto by necessity, and spending in drunkenness the greater part of their earnings. It was the unfortunate experience of the agents who conducted this inquiry to find that many of the men visited at their own homes during the evening were the worse for liquor. Such men rarely work more than four days a week, and often not more than two, but, however much they may earn, they never return to the factory until their money is exhausted, and necessity drives them to work again. Their homes are squalid, miserable, and uncared for, in keeping with themselves and their habits, whilst the dwellings of the steady, frugal, and industrious workers everywhere display a bright, cheerful, and comfortable appearance, and their wives and children are well fed, well clad, and well cared for.

The Bootmakers' Union.

At Redfern, the principal seat of the bootmaking industry, are situated the head quarters of the Bootmakers' Union, which has branches in all the principal towns throughout the Colony. These branches are under the control of the central authority, but act independently in matters of merely local interest. The Union includes only "makers" and "finishers," and in proportion to the whole number of workers of these two classes it is the foremost trade organisation in the Colony. Its numerical strength, inclusive of country members, is about 1,750, and it is an exceptionally well managed and influential body. It was recently proposed to form a Female Workers' Union, but having made no head-way it is feared the project must be abandoned.

The New "Log."

For many years the "log" or statement of working prices remained unchanged, notwithstanding the improvements and alterations in certain lines and the manufacture of various kinds of boots not known in the trade at the time it was agreed upon, until at length it failed to meet the purpose it was intended to serve, and as a natural result friction and dissatisfaction arose between employers and operatives. The Masters' Association complained that different scales existed for the same class of work, and the operatives felt that there should be a discriminating rate to meet the numerous innovations recently introduced. In the interests of all parties it became manifest that a complete revision of the "log" was of the first importance and should be no longer delayed. The work of revision was entered upon in an amicable and conciliatory spirit. The Union drew up a proposal dealing with over 100 boots or variations in

in boots, which then received much careful consideration from a committee whereon the Masters' Association and the Union were equally represented, and was finally agreed to without any material alteration. Owing to various causes the adoption of the new statement was delayed for several months, but a common understanding was eventually arrived at, and a "log" embodying all the essential points of the statement was brought into operation at the close of last year. The new "log" places all the manufacturers on a level in regard to the prices to be paid, which range some 10 per cent. above the old rates; on the other hand it provides that the quality of all work done by operatives shall be equal to a fixed standard, which is somewhat higher than has hitherto prevailed in many shops. Standard boots are held by the Union authorities and also by the Masters' Association, so that any question respecting quality or value of work can be readily determined. It is not improbable that the new "log" will have the effect of purging the trade of the more unskilled members, who have been in the habit of working in the small factories at lower rates than those paid in the larger establishments or sanctioned by the Union. This result, however, depends upon the adoption of the new "log" by all the factories, for there still remains the possibility that some of the smaller ones will disregard it and so perpetuate the disparity of prices it was intended to remove.

Although no serious disagreements have as yet arisen, the new "log" has not proved an unqualfied success, or given satisfaction to either masters or men, and about thirty disputed cases have already been settled by the arbitration committee. It is found that the advance in wages is not so general as was anticipated, being distributed for the most part among the "makers" and those engaged in the common classes of work, while "finishers" and operatives in the higher classes have suffered a slight reduction. The new system has also so far failed to remove the anomalies in the prices paid in different factories for work apparently of the same quality. It is hoped however that with the goodwill of all parties working in a friendly manner towards a satisfactory settlement these difficulties will shortly be obviated.

General Remarks.

The output of the factories is represented by an exceedingly large variety of boots, of many sizes, grades, and descriptions; the product of a certain leading establishment, for instance, embraces 98 different kinds of men's, 35 of youths', 30 of boys', 47 of women's 23 of maids', 24 of girls', and 10 of children's, or altogether a total of 267 varieties of boots and shoes of all shapes and sizes. In the manufacture of these are used a great many different kinds of leather, and combinations of leather and cloth, and along with these varieties of material there are many distinctions in workmanship, and innumerable modifications of shape and size. The common "blucher" boots are made in larger quantities than any other kind. Next in order comes the "elastic side" in many varieties, commanding a ready sale, and forming an important part of the general output.

The leather used in the manufacture of the lower grades of boots is usually the soft, porous, malodorous, and dark-coloured product of the local tanneries. The tanners find that this inferior leather pays better than the higher qualities, and the manufacturers perceive that they can make more profit out of the lowest class of boots made of the cheapest leather than out of the higher classes. The fact that high class boots command a ready sale and that the best qualities of leather are imported and used by the makers of "order" boots, proves that there is a good market for good boots. An idea of the magnitude of this market may be gathered from the figures of the import trade, which show that during the ten, years, 1881–90, boots and shoes to the value of nearly £5,750,000, and leather worth about £750,000, were imported; making a total import of about £6,500,000 sterling.

APPENDIX.

Details of Earnings, &c., in twenty-three Important Factories.

Factories		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	Averages.
Hands employed		108	270	290	100	130	41	46	21	46	46	168	23	59	86	50	96	45	20	30	22	140	133	30	Hands. 87
Hours of Labour	M.	44	44	50	50	50	48	48	50	44	44	44	44	50	44	50	44	44	44	44	48	44	44	50	Hours. 46
	F.	40	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44	44
On Weekly Wages.																									Wages.
Fitters	F.	20/- 25/-	18/- 20/-	20/- 30/-	22/6 25/-	25/-	18/- 22/-	22/6	25/-	25/-	25/-	20/- 25/-	20/-	25/-	20/- 25/-	25/-	22/- 25/-	25/-	25/-	23/-	25/-	18/- 25/-	23/-	25/-	23/1
Machinists	F.	25/-	23/-	20/- 27/-	20/- 30/-	23/-	20/- 22/-	23/-	25/-	25/-	25/-	20/- 25/-	23/-	25/-	22/6 25/-	23/-	25/- 27/6	18/- 25/-	15/- 22/6	20/- 32/6	20/-	17/- 25/-	23/-	20/- 22/-	23/1
Tiers off	F.	7/6 10/-	5/-	8/-	6/- 9/-	6/-	7/6	10/-	5/- 8/-	6/- 8/-	9/-	8/-	7/6 8/-	7/6	8/-	8/-	5/- 6/-	5/- 7/6	5/- 6/-	6/- 10/-	8/-	7/6	5/- 8/-	6/-	7/2
Sole-cutters	M.	40/-	45/-	40/- 50/-	40/- 45/-	45/-	60/-	50/-	40/-	45/-	45/-	45/- 50/-	40/-	50/- 55/-	40/-	45/-	45/- 50/-	45/-	45/-	50/-	45/-	40/- 50/-	40/- 45/-	50/-	45/10
Clickers	M.	40/- 45/-	42/6 47/6	45/- 47/6	40/- 52/6	40/- 50/-	45 - 50 -	45/-	45/-	45/-	45/-	42/-	40/-	50/-	40/-	47/6 55/-	47/6 55/-	40/- 50/-	45/-	50/-	40/-	45/- 50/-	45/- 50/-	45/-	48/10
Apprentices	M.	9/-	2/6 12/6	5/- 10/-	8/- 10/-	2/6 15/-	5/- 10/-	5/- 10/-	6/- 15/-	5/- 10/-	3/- 9/-	3/- 15/-	5/-	2/6 10/-	5/- 15/-	5/-	5/- 10/-	2/6 10/-	4/-	5/-	5/-	2/6 10/-	5/- 15/-	5/-	7/1
Piece-workers.																									
Makers	M.	45/-	45/-	45/-	40/-	40/- 45/-	40/- 45/-	35/- 50/-	35/-	42/-	45/-	42/6	48/-	60/-	35/-	35/- 40/-	40/- 45/-	40/- 45/-	40/- 45/-	45/- 50/-	27/6	50/-	44/-	35/-	42/7
Finishers	M.	50/-	45/-	47/6 50/-	50/- 55/-	45/- 50/-	45/- 47/6	42/-	47/-	50/-	48/- 55/-	58/-	45/-	50/- 55/-	56/-	55/- 60/-	50/- 60/-	55/-	55/-	50/-	35/-	75/- 100/-	59/-	40/-	53/4